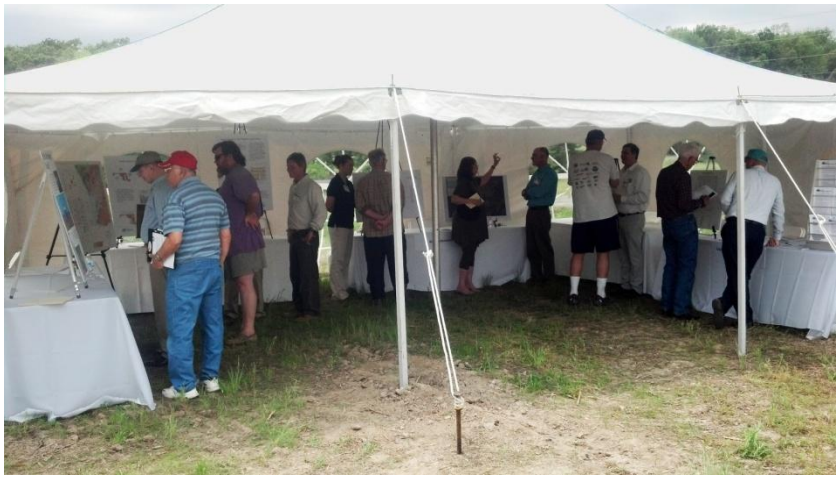
May / June / July 2013

The Dredging *Link*

Open House Addresses Pearce Creek Water Quality



The Maryland Port Administration participated in an open house on May 18 to discuss community concerns about the Pearce Creek dredged material placement site.

The Pearce Creek site, which is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was used for the placement of dredged material from the C&D Canal's approach channels from 1937 to 1992. The placement site has not been used since 1992, but the Corps of Engineers wishes to reactivate the site to provide placement capacity for upper Bay material that used to go to Poole's Island, before that site was closed by State law. A recent report from the U.S. Geological Survey found that Pearce Creek operations in the past contributed to water problems in some of the 241 nearby homes.

Metals from the dredged material have migrated into the groundwater and have impacted the color and taste of water extracted by residential wells. While the water is degraded, it continues to meet standards for potable drinking water.

The open house took place under a collection of tents at the Pearce Creek site. Nearly 100 local residents stopped by to have personal conversations with representatives of the Maryland Port Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Maryland Geological Survey, Maryland Environmental Service, and Cecil County Health Department. They talked about the nature of the problem, how it occurred, and potential solutions.

"It was a positive and helpful event," said community outreach coordinator Frances Flanigan. "People could see that the agencies are trying to work with them and provide information to help them understand the water issue."

Topics included the contents of groundwater and its movement through underground aquifers, free well testing, the dredging process, and the economic value of the Port. Experts were also on hand to discuss rules and techniques that govern modern dredged material placement sites, compared to those in the past.

The Pearce Creek placement site was built over a stream and its wetlands, which made it much easier for metals in the soil to filter downward into groundwater. "This is an old placement site, and it wasn't managed in the old days the way the new sites are managed now," Flanigan said.

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Top-Notch Interns at Masonville Cove

Students, critters, and staff at the Masonville Cove Environmental Center have benefited from the recent efforts of two talented student interns, Rebecca Jones and John Thiess.

Both are top students and new graduates of Benjamin Franklin High School at Masonville Cove in Baltimore.

Rebecca was valedictorian and John was salutatorian of the class of 2013.

“They have brought a lot of talent and hard work to their internships, and we will have the privilege of continuing to work with them in the summer,” said Rachael Dickey, an educator with the Living Classrooms Foundation who works at Masonville Cove.

Masonville Cove is adjacent to the Maryland Port Administration’s newest dredged material placement site. As the placement site was developed, the MPA responded to community requests to restore the neglected shoreline and access to the cove. The restoration included the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center, which opened in 2009.

Rebecca, whose internship is funded by the MPA, began work in February. She has nurtured the critters who live at the center and assisted educators with school day and weekend programs.

“The kids are all excited to learn about the environment and it’s such a pleasure to watch them figure out and understand challenging things,” Rebecca said.

Rebecca took a few lessons home herself. “I’ve learned a lot about myself, and the environment, through hands-on work and observation,” she said.

John’s internship is funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. John provided lots of help during the environmental festival and will develop several projects over the summer.

“It is a really fun experience,” John said. “You never know what your day will be like.”

Open House Continued….

If the Pearce Creek site is reactivated, substantial safeguards would be in place to protect water quality. The Corps and Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) are currently discussing what steps need to be taken to secure an MDE permit to reactivate. At the open house, the Corps of Engineers helped explain how liners and slurry walls would prevent the water and sediment in dredged material from mixing with the groundwater system.

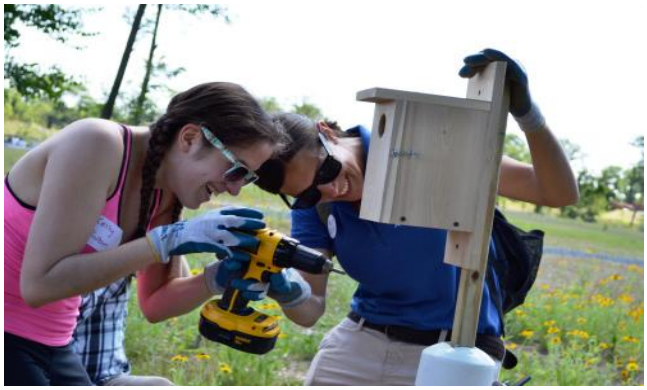
In the meantime, the Maryland Port Administration and the Corps of Engineers are exploring ways to improve the current quality of local groundwater. Options include upgrading residential wells by digging deeper into an unaffected aquifer; providing upgraded in-home treatment systems; building a new self-contained water treatment plant to serve the community; or building a seven-mile pipeline to draw water from the town of Cecilton.

Residents were mailed a questionnaire about their preferences. Sixty-six households have responded so far, with no clear consensus among respondents as to a preferred course of action. “Over the summer, we’ll continue working with residents and community leaders on their questions,” Flanigan said. “In the fall, we hope to propose a solution.”

Masonville Cove Abuzz with Energetic Volunteers

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, Living Classrooms Foundation, and Maryland Port Administration helped bring scores of people out on June 22 to help with the on-going restoration of Masonville Cove.

Seventy-one volunteers comprised the energetic team that helped clear debris from the shoreline, plant 4,000 native wetland grasses, and install 10 bird boxes. Some were seeing this “urban wilderness” for the first time and learned about the new outdoor opportunities it offers.



Congressman John Sarbanes of Maryland’s 3rd Congressional District also attended the event and spoke about the importance of the No Child Left Inside Act, which aims to increase environmental education and environmental literacy standards nationwide.

The Masonville Cove is adjacent to the Masonville dredged material placement site on the Patapsco River. Maryland Port Administration and Maryland Environmental Service have been working with the community to restore access to the river, improve wildlife habitat, and clean up the shoreline. The entities also constructed the Masonville Cove Environmental Education Center, where the Aquarium, Living Classrooms Foundation and other partner organizations host a variety of programs for students and adults.